

Field Naturalists Club of Ballarat Inc

September 1998



Acianthus fornicatus.

Caladenia carnea.

Lyperanthus nigricans.

Pterostylis nutans.

Pterostylis ophioglossa.

A.B.G.
Maloney et al.

Meetings are held at the Ballarat Horticulture centre, corner of Gregory and Gillies Streets, ie. the NW corner of the Botanic Gardens, commencing at 7-30pm

Excursions depart from Creswick Plaza at 9-30 am, unless specified otherwise.

President: Mrs Claire Dalman.....

Secretary: Mrs Pat Murphy.....

Editor: Mr Brian Andrews.....

Vice President: Mr Greg Binns.....

Treasurer: Mr John Gregurke.....

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DIARY DATES

Fri 4th September, Meeting. *Decline in Woodland Birds.*

Speaker Mr Simon Kennedy, Science honours student, Ballarat University.

Sat 5th September, Excursion. *A study of roadside reserves in the Moorabool Shire?* Leader(s), Club member(s).

11th - 13th September. *VFNC. Excursions Weekend, Hosted by Castlemaine FNC.* Good speakers, good excursions!

Fri 2nd October. Meeting. *The Magic and Intrigue of semi-Parasitic Plants.* Speaker Ms Cecily Falkingham.

Sun 4th October. Excursion. *Leigh River, Mt Mercer: Grasslands & woodlands.* Leaders Jenny & Peter Sedgwick, Local Conservationists.

FIELD REPORTS

Little (sp?) whip snake, Meredith, Lyndsay Fink.

Nodding and tall greenhoods at Invermay for some weeks.

Magpies and currawongs also nesting. Ken McDonald.

Brolgas (2), Tues 28th, Burrumbete area, Brian Gavan.

Pair of White's thrushes in garden, Mt Helen, John Mildren.

Yellow billed spoonbill, in dam - first spoonbill observed there and dam at lowest level ever! Durham Lead, Tony Dyson.

Curlew (sp?), nesting just below window at holiday accommodation, also sea eagle (sp?) eating sausages!

Queensland, Avis Barlow.

Southern right whale, in bay, Claire Dalman.

Great egret, Lake Wendouree. Also moorhen progressing like an "icebreaker", one morning when there was ice on the lake.

Striated
thornbills and
striated
pardalotes, Lake
St. Alan
Morrison.

Black fronted
plovers, Winter
swamp. Pat
Murphy.

p1



Brolga
~ by Peter Slater.

A MEDLEY OF TALKS

Four speakers gave a variety of talks at the August meeting:-

Tony Dyson - Utilizing Solar Energy.

When Tony and Virginia were building their house they had a slight problem - connection of mains electricity would have cost \$28,000! They decided to go solar!

Tony explained that light energy, falling on layers of silicon, can move electrons from one layer to the other, producing an electrical voltage as a result. The power so generated is 150 watts/m², they have 2m² of solar cells - which cost \$21,000! The electricity produced is stored in lead acid batteries until needed. For domestic uses the electricity has to be changed from low voltage d.c. to 250V a.c., this is done with an inverter. At this point Tony stressed the importance of having an inverter which had a sine wave rather than a square wave output, - Square waves are cheaper to produce but they are harsh on electrical equipment!

Most solar systems are hybrid systems using wind, diesel etc as backups, Tony has a diesel generator as a backup.

Water heating is done by passing cool water through black polypipe on the roof, storing the resultant hot water in a 300l storage tank. In cold weather a wood burning backup heater is used. Tony showed an impressive pile of wood in his shed. At this stage Tony caused quite a bit of controversy by coming out with the statement :- "if a man wants to live well in such a system; he needs a good block-splitter, a good wheelbarrow and a good wife!" --- but only amongst the ladies, the fellows were too busy applauding!

Solar power might not seem related to natural history but we have to realize that our present reliance on fossil fuels will almost certainly have devastating effects on nature in the future!

Very soon we may all have to be solar. Thanks Tony for being a pioneer!

Brian Andrews - Us and Spiders.

Starting off with a slide of a spiders web - covered in dew, I commented on its obvious beauty, but even so, I knew a lot of people would want to ask - "why study spiders?"

To answer this question I recalled the time I went on a BOC excursion and found a person searching for snails. I pestered him with the question "why study those?" He quickly replied, "well, no one else does!" His individuality and persistence had obviously given rewards - he had discovered

and studied species new to science and obviously enjoyed working on the frontier of knowledge! spiders offer a similar challenge and potential interest. There are about 1500 species of spiders in Australia and about half of them are undescribed! Compare this with birds - about 750 species, all described in detail! It is interesting to note that field reports are not in proportion to the numbers involved, in fact the opposite is observed! In fact the book - Victorian Urban Wildlife, quotes figures from the Urban Wildlife Watch, submitted by interested observers between April and December 1988 :- birds, about 240 species and 15,000 sightings, but for spiders the grand total was 12 species and 82 sightings! We're obviously a bit biased! Why?

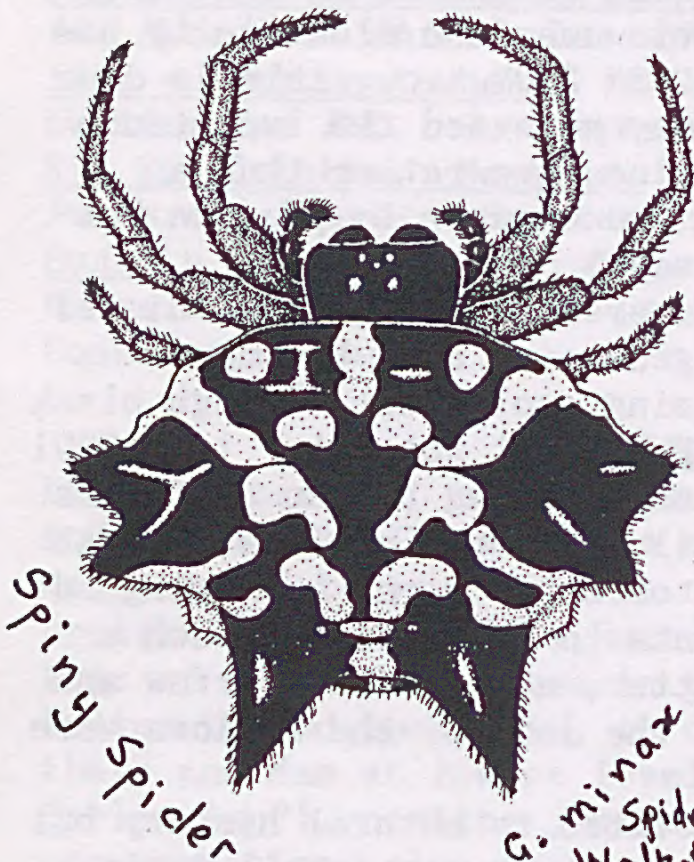
With a slide of a spiny spider, I reminded people it wasn't due to lack of species! Nor was it due to lack of individuals - I counted 30 spiny spiders, each with a web, in a space about the size of soccer ball! Also an English scientist has estimated the density of spiders in English woodlands to be about 4,000,000 per Hectare!

With a slide of a leaf curling spider I explained that camouflage and concealment results in most spiders not being noticed.

A slide of an outback toilet, decorated with a spiders-reddack, led to my favourite Wicket + redback on the toilet seat joke!

The joke emphasized the point that many people are just scared of spiders. This led to 30 questions being asked to see how arachnaphobic the 21 people in the audience were. I won't be sending anyone to a psychiatrist yet, but 3 people gave 10 or more arachnaphobic responses! In fact just about half of the group (9 people) said that if there was a spider on the ceiling over their bed, they wouldn't be able to go to sleep unless someone kills it for them! ---and we are supposed to be "nature lovers"!

Then people insisted that I disclose what was in the cardboard box, unfortunately as I went to grab the tarantula, it bit me, and it was flung into the audience - landing on a squealing lady!



I had visions of being expelled from the club but the lady is a good sport and she says that she has forgiven me!

Brian Gavan - Creswick Miners Trail / GDT.

A picture
is better than
a 1000 words!

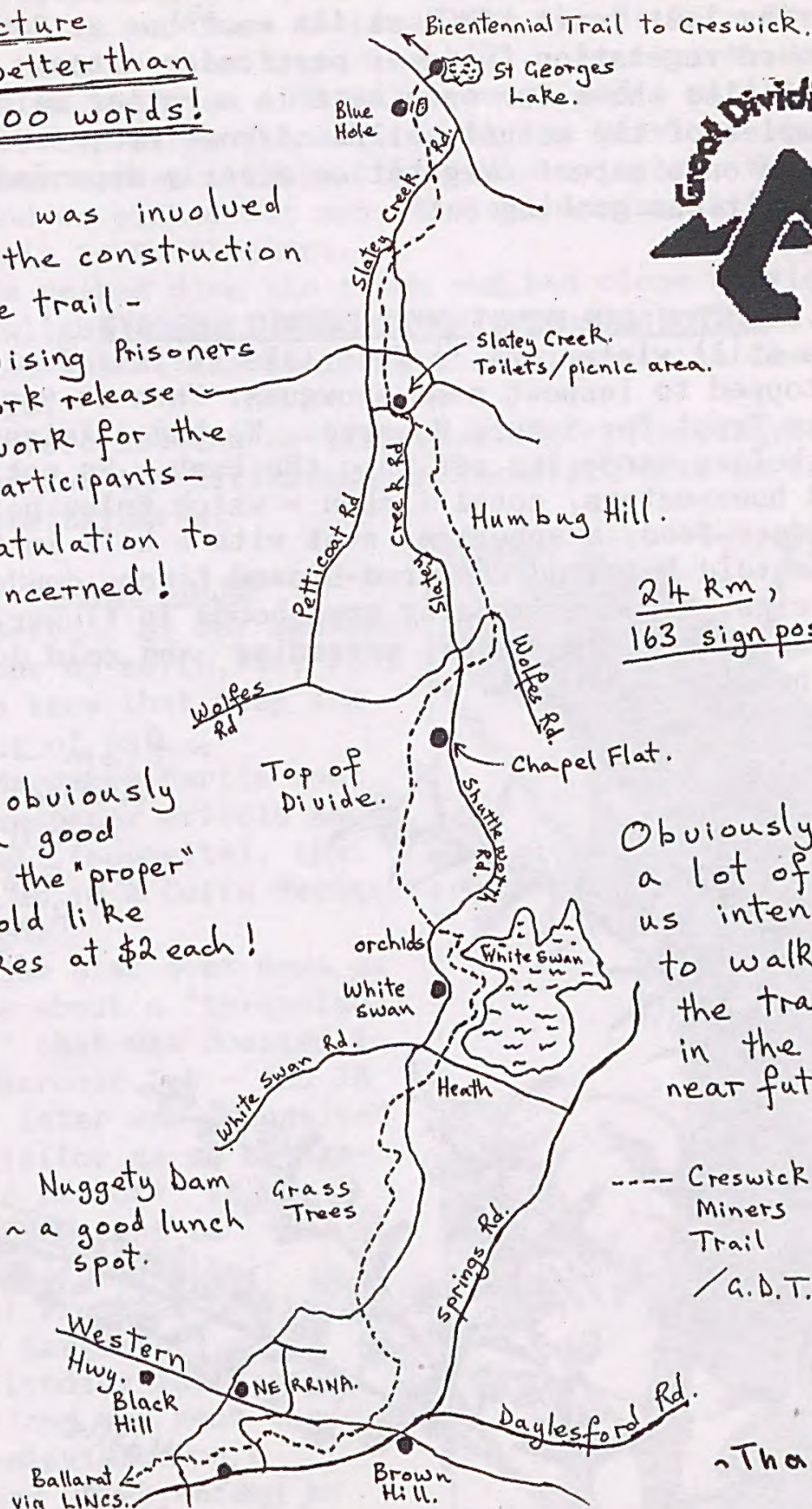
Brian was involved
with the construction
of the trail -
supervising prisoners
on work release
and "work for the
dole" participants -
congratulation to
all concerned!

Brian obviously
gave a good
talk ~ the "proper"
maps sold like
hot cakes at \$2 each!



24 km,
163 sign posts.

Obviously
a lot of
us intend
to walk
the trail
in the
near future!



~Thanks Brian!

Carol Hall - Soil Profiles and Resultant Vegetation.

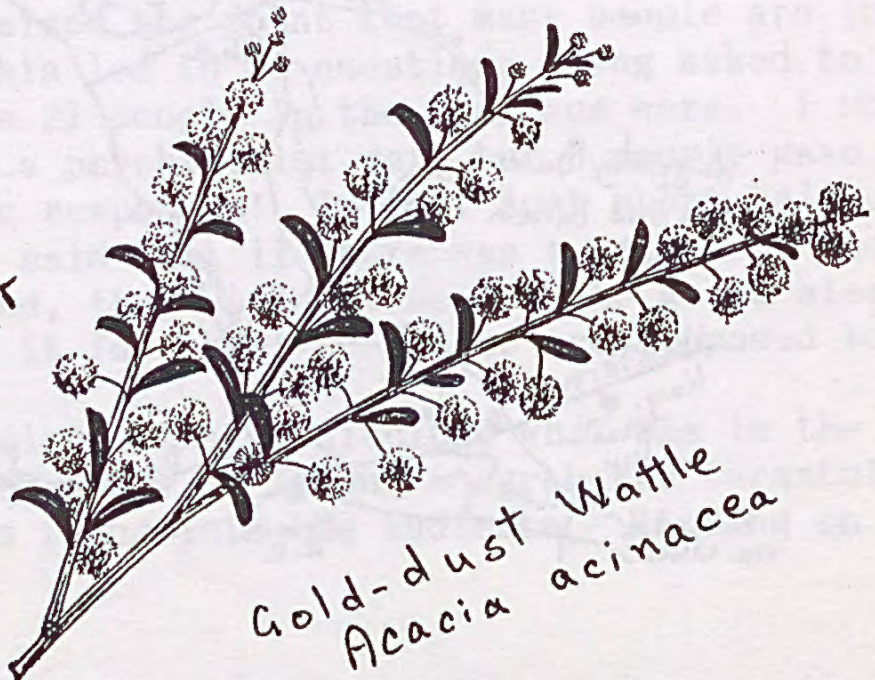
Carol kept this talk short due to the lateness of the night - and she had given a tremendous talk last month! She had several posters made up for our inspection. They were prepared during last years VFNCA skills workshop at Rowsley. Each one showed vegetation found at particular sites. Soil profiles were also shown for each site in a rather unique manner - samples of the actual soil/sand/rock etc, were actually glued onto paper! Vegetation clearly depended upon the soil that it was growing on!
Thanks Carol!

LINTON AND MOUNT BUTE SCENIC RESERVE

It was still winter but it felt like spring! Just before Linton we stopped to inspect some snowgums. Then it was off to the Victorian Trust for Nature Reserve. We had a leisurely morning tea before wandering off into the bush. We noticed brown headed honeyeaters, coral lichen - which Helen pointed out was reindeer food, a spherical nest with a hole in the side - which I was told belonged to a red-browed finch, dodder - and yes, it was right handed! Nodding greenhoods in flower, blackboys, correa reflexa, hovea, spreading and gold dust wattles and purple tetratheca.



Spreading Wattle
Acacia diffusa



Gold-dust Wattle
Acacia acinacea

~ from ...
Victorian
Wattles
- by F.J.C.
Rogers

Grey thrush, yellow robin and restless flycatcher were added to the bird list. We stopped for lunch and Kevin handed me a red and black spider *N. bicolor*, which was quite happy to walk up my sleeve!

Then it was down the road, to the Mt Bute Scenic Reserve. It is a bush area on a granite hill. As soon as we got out of the cars we heard an Australian raven and a striated pardalote calling - two birds not noticed at the previous stop. We tested our nerves climbing the lookout tower. We admired the view, and we picked out many distant landmarks from Mt Warrenheip to Mt Elephant.

We walked down the track and had close up views of a swamp wallaby - which was busy watching us! There were early nancy and Australian buttercups in flower - in the grassy clearings.

Before leaving we inspected the red stringybarks, Pat pointing out the difference in the fruit between the red and brown stringybarks.

TRAVEL TALES

Several of our members have gone up north, but it's nice to know that they are thinking of us!

Margaret Martin sent me a newspaper article about the Quoll (opposite), that turned up in a Coffs Harbour backyard!

She also sent down an article about a "turquoise parrot" that was donated to Coffs Harbour Zoo - and 18 months later was recognized by a visitor as an orange-bellied parrot! It has since been sent to Healesville for their special breeding program. Thanks Margaret!

Lyndsay is in Queensland and sent the club his best wishes on a postcard which showed an attractive area of rainforest. Thanks Lyndsay!



The Advocate/Coffs Harbour. p6

It seems Greg and Genni have headed west. They have passed Wyndham, Greg said Cambridge Gulf was awe inspiring! With 35°C+ they have been enjoying Kevin's water! They have travelled on the Stuart, Buchanan and Buntine highways. Not one rabbit has been seen and only a few road-kill kangaroos. The country west of Katherine is experiencing a rather harsh dry season, following a dry wet season, birds and plants have had there movement and growth affected. Trees and shrubs in many areas seem to have been under stress, and many bird species are not in their usual areas or numbers. Nevertheless, the country is beautiful, varied, and rich in life and colour! Many Torresian zone species have been seen. Water holes are proving to be profitable! - but the savannah woodlands between the colourful ranges and the Baob country are wonderful to walk through. No snakes but two colourful lizards. Fine crocodile specimens! Heading towards the west Kimberly - and more treasures.

Thanks Greg!

BDA

AUGUST POSER...ANTING

Since the ants are meat ants, the birds stick them under their feathers to eat the lice and other parasites which the birds can't catch themselves!

BDA

SEPTEMBER POSER...BILLY AND JOHNY AND FIBBING

After Billy (I never had) and Johny (I'll never introduce), we obviously can't trust anyone!

Test your lie detecting skills on the following statements, give them a true or false rating:-

1. Earwigs have wings
2. The highest mountain in Canada is Mt McKinley
3. Some fungi are green even though they contain no chlorophyll.
4. The website address for the Australian Museum is ww.austmus.gov.au
5. Boneseed infestations should be reduced soon.
6. The basic element used in solar panels is silicon.
7. If you see the word "irruption" in a nature magazine it would mean that the author meant "eruption".
8. If you get up in the morning and see a rainbow it probably means there is rain on the way.
9. I would have expected the lolly pop tree to be blasted to smithereens by now!
10. You have given a talk at a club meeting, or led a club excursion, or provided an item for the newsletter, or bought something in for the "show and tell table", or put in a field report, or supplied something for the trading table.

BDA